1318 VERMONT AVE., NW
(Mary McLeod Bethune House)
Washington
District of Columbia

HABS No. DC-775

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HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

1318 VERMONT AVENUE, NW
(Mary McLeod Bethune House)

HABS No. DC-775

Location: 1318 Vermont Avenue, NW, Washington, District of Columbia.

Present Owner/ Occupant: The Bethune Museum and Archives.

Present Use: Museum and archives.

Significance: The row house at 1318 Vermont Avenue, NW, attained its prestige as the headquarters of the National Council of Negro Women (NCNW) and as the Washington residence of Mary McLeod Bethune, the educator and civil rights leaders. Constructed in 1875, the brick house, with its three-story facade, bay window, and mansard roof, reflects many of the changes in building regulations reflected in the speculative development of new neighborhoods in the District. Its transition from a single-family home for the upper-middle class in the late nineteenth century, to a boarding house and shop in the early twentieth century, to the headquarters of the National Council of Negro Women from the 1940s to 1960s, and currently to a museum and archive, exemplifies the shifting nature of the Logan Circle area. During the past century this neighborhood has changed from an affluent, nearly all-white community to an enclave of the black elite, and finally, to a racially mixed district. Bethune's association with the house made it a center of activity in the 1940s as a meeting place for the NCNW as well as for prominent figures including Eleanor Roosevelt and Mary Church Terrell.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Date of erection: 1875. The Washington, D.C., tax book of 1875 shows William S. Roose to have been the owner of lot 55, square 242 (1318 Vermont). At this time he held only the unimproved lot, valued at $1,447. The following year, Roose was assessed for an $8,000 improvement on lot 55, indicating that he had constructed a house on the property. The land itself was valued at $2,251.

2. Architect: Not known.

3. Original and subsequent owners and occupants: In its 118-year history, 1318 Vermont Avenue has had a number of occupants and owners. William S. Roose, a tobacco merchant and real estate developer, constructed the house in 1875, but

never lived in it. On 9 June 1875 he sold the house for $20,000 to John J. McElhone, a reporter for the House of Representatives.[1] The 1880 U.S. Census shows that McElhone, his wife, two sons, a daughter, and three servants, one white and two black, inhabited the house. This type of household was typieal for the neighborhood until the 1910s.

McElhone died in 1890.[2] From what can be gleaned from the records, he apparently mortgaged his property before his death on 20 May 1890. A deed recording the transfer of property to Frank G. Carpenter states that he bought the house for $14,600 on 4 June 1891 from Arthur T. Brice, et al., acting as trustees. A case between Osceola C. Green, complainant, and Mary M. McElhone, defendant, brought before the Supreme Court of Washington, D.C., led the judges to appoint Brice, et al., to act as trustees of the property and gave them permission to sell it.[3] According to the U.S. Census of 1910, Carpenter and his wife lived in the house with their son, daughter and two black servants.

In 1912 Alphonso Gravalles, an Italian immigrant, and his wife, Anna, purchased the house from the Carpenters. The Gravalles worked as ladies' tailors and ran a shop out of their home at 1318 Vermont. By this time the neighborhood consisted of more renters than owners; many of the houses on Vermont Avenue accommodated single lodgers rather than nuclear families and their servants. The U.S. Census of 1920 shows that Alphonso and Anna lived with his mother, sister, two daughters, a nephew, a brother-in-law, four lodgers, and a young white couple who rented rooms in the house and were listed as a separate household.

The last owners of the house, the National Council of Negro Women, bought the structure and all of its furnishings for $15,500 from Anna Gravalles in December 1943. The NCNW used the house as its headquarters, as a meeting place for various conferences and events, and as the Washington, D.C., residence of Mary McLeod Bethune, the NCNW's founder and president. After a fire in 1966, the NCNW vacated the house and established permanent headquarters on Connecticut Avenue in Dupont Circle. The building stood abandoned until 1975, when the Council finally received grant money to begin restoration work. In 1977, the NCNW resumed operations in the house, although the headquarters remained on Connecticut Avenue. Two years later the Council established the Mary McLeod Bethune Museum and Archives, which has oecupied the house sinee then.

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[1]Deed, William S. and Jane Roose to John J. McElhone, 10 June 1875, Liber 786, Folio 294, Recorder of Deeds Office, Washington, D.C. (hereafter referred to as RD).

[2]"Deaths," Washington Evening Star, 17 June 1890.

[3]Trust, John J. McElhone et.ux. to Glover and Brice, 20 May 1890, Liber 1505, Folio 66, RD. Deed, Arthur T. Brice, et.al. to Frank G. Carpenter, 25 July 1891, Liber 1590, Folio 484, RD.

4. Builder, contractor, suppliers: James Robbins, a carpenter and contractor in Washington, D.C., may have been the builder. He and his wife, Maria, owned lots 57 and 58 on Vermont Avenue (1314 Vermont). D.C. tax assessments ending 30 June 1876 show that the Robbinses built their house, shown in the books as a $9,500 improvement, about the same time Roose built his.[4] As a contractor, Robbins most likely constructed his own house. In addition, Roose sold 1316 Vermont (lot 56) on 1 September 1875 for $20,000, the same amount the McElhones paid for 1318 Vermont. The nearly identical facades and plans of 1318 and 1316 Vermont and their strong resemblance to 1314 Vermont make it clear that all had the same designer. Furthermore, the strong similarity among these houses and others in the area, namely 1310, 1342, and 1344 Vermont and 1300 and 1302 Rhode Island indicate a common builder for all these structures; more research is required to support this assertion. (See Vermont Avenue, NW--HABS No. DC-530 for composite photographs of the streetscape.)

5. Original plans and construction: No original plans or drawings have been located. The L-shaped row house as built stood three stories high with a raised basement, brick walls, and tin-covered mansard roof. The 1887 Hopkins fire insurance map shows a brick dwelling with a stable and shed at the alley end of the lot. Subsequent maps show no changes in the footprint of either structure. A physical examination of the house reveals only minor modifications, none of which have significantly altered the size of the house or its floor plan.

   An examination of contemporary pattern books and catalogues of architectural details shows that the ornament on the house closely resembles mass-produced detail of the period. Whether the trim was ordered from companies outside the Washington area or produced locally remains to be determined.

6. Alterations and additions: No building permits or other physical evidence exist to suggest that the building was altered in any way before 1918.

   During the Gravalles' occupancy of the house, two structural changes occurred. In September 1918, two 8" steel I-beams were installed over the alley door in the garage (now called the Carriage House) at a cost of $50. The building permit for the work states that the garage was used for storage.[5]

   In September 1934, W.L. Eaton, architect, and B. Trotta, contractor, erected a raised open rear porch with a brick and steel frame and wood floor and roof. The

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[4]Record Group 351, "Assessment of Washington City Real Estate, For Taxes, for the Year Ending June 30th, 1876," Records of the District of Columbia, National Archives, Washington, D.C. (hereafter referred to as NA), 472, 501.

[5]Building Permit #870, Washington, D.C., 10 September 1918, NA.

kitchen window was converted into a door opening onto the porch.[6] The total cost for the project amounted to $150.

After the NCNW moved into the house in December 1943, plans to modernize and redecorate the building went into effect. Much of the furniture in the house when the NCNW purchased it was sold or given away. A letter from Jeanetta Welch Brown, executive secretary of the NCNW, to Bethune who was in Daytona Beach, Florida, states that Henry Byrd, contractor, was "doing the three floors for $2,950" and installing new plumbing and heating (radiators) for $1,030. After he completed his work, around 15 September 1944, Abe Lichtman, owner of many Washington, D.C., theaters, would fund and decorate the first-floor front parlor as a reception room.[7] However, a building permit shows that William T. Gray, contractor, installed two basins, one laundry tray, one shower, and two water-closets for $1,100. The permit suggests that a bathroom was installed on the third floor while all the fixtures in the original bathroom on the second floor were replaced.[8]

On 7 November 1945, D.C. Building Permit #281171 lists a roof repair and new chimney flues by J.A. Cook, contractor, for $100. However, the permit erroneously cites the Gravalles as owners. Two D.C. Building Permits record plumbing repairs in February 1952.[9]

In the 1960s, the NCNW proposed two plans to change the appearance of the house. In 1964 it commissioned the Washington architectural firm Byrd and Bryant to redesign the house. Their proposed drawings show a two-dimensional facade with a gothic theme, including stained-glass windows. Neighbors protested vocifcrously, stating that the renovation would destroy the streetscape of nineteenth-century row houses with projecting bay windows and dormers.[10] The second proposed change involved attempting to purchase the house next door and knocking down the common wall to enlarge the NCNW headquarters.[11] A fire in January 1966 prevented this plan, ultimately saving the house from any other destructive proposals.

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[6]Building Permit #174494, Washington, D.C., 12 September 1934, NA.

[7]Letter from Jeanetta Welch Brown to Mary McLeod Bethune, 30 August 1944, Bethune Museum and Archives, Washington, D.C., (hereafter referred to as BMA).

[8]Building Permit #273706, Washington, D.C., 3 October 1944, NA. The second-floor bathroom is assumed to be original to the house as there are no building permits prior to 1944 that state that such a room was added after construction of the house.

[9]Building Permit #A-45669, Washington, D.C., 6 February 1952; Building Permit #A-46069, Washington, D.C., 24 February 1952.

[10]Willard Clopton, "Neighbors Can't Face Plan to Put Glass Facade on Old Townhouse," Washington Post, 15 April 1964.

[11]Ruth A. Sykes, "The Story of Council House," ca. 1977, Washington, D.C., BMA.

The fire started by a leak in the heating oil tank in the basement caused extensive damage to the house.[12] In addition to fire damage, smoke and water damage made the house uninhabitable. The NCNW moved its headquarters to 1346 Connecticut Avenue, NW, and left the building vacant for eleven years.[13]

The NCNW undertook major repairs and renovations of the house beginning in February 1975 and carried out by AMSC, Inc., a local contractor. According to documents, photographs of the rehabilitation, and an examination of the physical fabric of the house, the major changes were as follows: new tin roof, air-conditioning, plumbing, and gas heating systems installed. First-floor repairs and changes included a new hardwood floor and hanging fluorescent light fixtures in the rear parlor. The second- and third-floor ceilings were dropped and covered with acoustic tiles, hiding the tin coffered ceiling original to the house. The basement, having suffered the most serious damage during the fire, received a new bathroom, kitchen, fireplace, and storage rooms. Hollow-core doors and metal knobs replaced many interior doors and knobs throughout the house. The exterior of the house was painted. The carriage house was converted into office and storage space. Renovations continued through 1978.

In 1980, Baliles Contracting, Inc., began restoration work to return the house to an appearance reminiscent of the 1880s. Through 1981 major changes occurred on the exterior and interior of the building. The exterior brick was repointed and painted red and the trim was repaired as needed and painted tan. Restorers stripped the front doors and stairway of their dark brown paint and stained and varnished them. The most intensive work involved painstakingly painting and graining the paneling below the first floor windows, beneath the front stair, and on the front doors, to match the maple burl veneer on the paneled pocket doors in the parlors. New door frames, window frames, and baseboards were installed and grained to resemble oak. The fluorescent light fixtures were removed and all the plaster moldings, medallions, ceilings, and walls were repaired, and recast from the originals in some cases. The marble fireplaces were reconditioned. Photographs in the Bethune Museum and Archives document this work and examination of the building supports it.

From 1988 to 1991 another phase of restoration work, funded by federal appropriation, occurred. A document entitled "Renovation/Restoration, Phase Two FY 1988 and 1989" records many of these changes, carried out by Architectnique, AIA, and Terry Lamb, Restoration Consultant.[14] Exterior work included repairing the black and white marble walkway in front of the house,

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[12]Dorothy I. Height, "Testimonies," Washington, D.C., ca. 1966, Washington, D.C., BMA; Sykes, n.p.

[13]Bethune Museum and Archives, ed., "Report of the Restoration/Adaptation of 1318 Vermont," 1989, Washington, D.C., BMA.

[14]"Renovation/Restoration, Phase Two, FY 1988 and 1989," ca. 1987, Washington, D.C., BMA.

installing new brownstone steps on the stoop, refabricating the iron railing and gates, replacing the 40-lb. tin roof, the gutters and downspouts, replacing the rotted wood framing beneath the roof, and installing two new air-conditioning units on the roof of the ell. A new porch with a slightly sloped roof supported by two fluted metal Doric columns resting on the ground replaced the raised porch added in 1934. The entire rear wall was stuccoed over and the kitchen door leading to the rear patio was sealed. Landscaping of the rear yard consisted of new "period" plantings and a patio laid with marble squares to match the front walkway. On the interior, workers installed new wiring and airducts, sealed the fireplace openings, converted the kitchen into a gift shop, and closed off the door between two offices on the second floor. The carriage house was completely gutted, its window openings enlarged and filled with aluminum sliding windows, and its interior converted into a climate-controlled space to house the Archives of the National Council of Negro Women.[15]

B. Historical Context:

The building at 1318 Vermont Avenue is typical of the many row houses erected in the northwest quadrant of Washington in the late-nineteenth century. With its brick walls, one-story bay window, side-hall entrance, mansard roof with dormers, and rear ell, the house represents a paradigm of the row-house form that emerged in the 1870s. To some extent, the shape of this and later kinds of row houses was strongly influenced by building regulations dating back as far as 1791 when President George Washington established such rules for the City of Washington. Two articles in particular figured largely in the history of the Washington row house. The first article required that the walls of houses be constructed of brick and stone as a fire-prevention measure. The fourth article, "addressed party walls, which immediately established the fact that Washington's streets would be lined with row houses."[16]

Washington's regulations persisted until the late nineteenth century with few changes, although the materials provision was retracted on 1796. In 1872, the Board of Public Works issued new building regulations which would have an enormous impact on public health and safety as well as on the structure and appearance of row houses in the city. The most important included "parking," which gradually relinquished public space along roads to private owners in order to save money on paving the wide streets laid out under the L'Enfant Plan. This policy, actually set in motion by Congress and an earlier municipal administration, soon allowed building projections into what had been public space. This was manifested most strongly in the use of bay windows which could extend "a

[15]Bethune's papers are housed at Bethune-Cookman College, Daytona Beach, Florida.

[16]Alison K. Hoagland, "Nineteenth-Century Building Regulations in Washington, D.C.," Records of the Columbia Historical Society of Washington, D.C. 52 (1989), 59.

distance of four feet beyond the building line."[17] In addition, parking provided room for front gardens which beautified the space between the streets and the row houses. Other significant regulations for the row house included bringing party walls up above the roofline, requiring floor timbers of adjoining buildings to be separated by brick, and prohibiting roof coverings of combustible materials. When the house at 1318 Vermont Avenue was constructed it reflected these new building regulations. On a lot only 23' wide, the row house form with its projecting bay in front and ell extension in the rear maximized space on a narrow urban lot.

Because of the slow growth of Washington as a major urban center, infrastructure and real estate development beyond the city core did not occur until after the Civil War. With the creation of a territorial government in 1871 and its powerful Board of Public Works, run by Alexander "Boss" Shepherd, the city rapidly expanded beyond the boundaries of L'Enfant's plan. The northwestern part of the district experienced the most growth because Shepherd and many of his cronies owned land in that area.

Logan Circle (known as Iowa Circle until Congress changed its name in 1930) and the streets radiating from it enjoyed some of the Board's attention. During much of the nineteenth century the area was known as Blodgett's Wilderness, inhabited by scattered farmhouses and shacks housing runaway slaves and freed blacks. However, after the Civil War, the region's proximity to the city center made it a profitable location for development. In 1872, workers graded the circle and planted grass and trees there. Other major improvements included the laying of sidewalks and the erection of gas lamps and a fountain. Some of the streets were improved as well in 1872 and 1873. Wood blocks covered Rhode Island Avenue and the road around the circle while concrete paved 13th Street nearly up to the circle. Vermont Avenue remained unpaved until the 1880s; then it was paved with concrete and asphalt (see Logan Circle--HABS No. DC-339 and Vermont Avenue--HABS No. DC-711).

These improvements spurred development in the area, quickly transforming Logan Circle into a highly desirable neighborhood for white upper-middle-class and wealthy Washingtonians. Three- to four-story row houses rose up along the circle's radiating streets. On the circle itself, wealthy owners had row houses and semi-detached houses erected.

The rapidity with which property changed hands and the explosive development of the area attested to the circle's popularity among real estate speculators. In 1874, William S. Roose, a wealthy merchant and developer, purchased lots 55, 56, 60, and 61 on the west side of Vermont Avenue just south of the circle. Approximately one year later, he built houses on lots 55 and 56--the ones that stand at 1318 and 1316 Vermont Avenue today. In 1876, Roose built a house on lot 60 (1308 Vermont), assessed as a $5,500 improvement

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[17] Laws of the Corporation of the City of Washington Passed by the 68th Council (Washington, D.C.: McGill-Witherow, 1871), ch. 15 quoted in Hoagland, "Building Regulations," 72.

in the 1877 tax book, then sold it in the first half of 1877 to Francis A. Richardson. Lot 61 is a narrow strip of land alongside lot 60; nothing was ever built on it.[18] Roose's speculative interests turned to other areas of the city. The tax book for 1879 shows that he construeted four brick row houses, more modest than those on Vermont, on S Street between 16th and 15th Streets.

Between 1875 and 1890, builders erected numerous houses on or just off the cirele in the Second Empire or Richardson Romanesque styles which were popular at the time. In addition to Robbins, architects and builders active in the development of other parts of the city worked in the Logan Circle area. These included builders such as the Downing brothers and architects such as Thomas F. Schneider, Henry R. Searles, and James McGill, who designed numerous houses in the new suburb of LeDroit Park.[19] While many of the figures responsible for this growth were white, blacks also contributed to the development of Logan Circle. For example, Albert McIntosh, a contractor, graded, reset curbstones, and relaid brick pavement on P Strcet between 11th and 15th streets.[20]

The neighborhood hit its peak of popularity in the late 1870s and early 1880s when figures including Ulysses S. Grant, son of the U.S. President, J.G. Hill, Supervising Architect of the Treasury, and General John A. Logan built magnificent houses on the circle. A few successful African-Americans also lived on the circle, a precursor to the period when many prominent blacks lived there. Frank G. Carpenter, who lived at 1318 Vermont from ca. 1891 until 1912, noted that his "own [black] caterer owns an elegant three-story brick and carries on his cooking operations in the basement, while he uses the upper stories for his family. His house is on Iowa Circle in one of the most aristocratie sections of the city."[21] Carpenter, himself, was well known. He worked in Washington as a journalist during the 1880s and '90s. His popular column on Washington social life was syndicated in newspapers throughout the country. He also strove to professionalize the field of journalism. The 1892 City Directory lists him as the manager of the American Press Association. Despite the presence of such prominent people, Logan Circle's reputation as a fashionable enclave of the well-to-do was short-lived. By the 1890s, it had been surpassed by Dupont Circle as the place to see and be seen.

Nevertheless, Logan Circle rcmained a desirable neighborhood for the white middle class into the 1910s. The censuses of 1880 and 1900 show most of the houses in the area to be owned and inhabited by white families. In the majority of these cases, men headed the

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[18]Roose sold lot 61 along with lots 15 and 16 to Charles T. Smith on 9 October 1875 for $1,901. See Deed, William S. and Jane Roose to Charles T. Smith, 9 October 1875, Liber 795, Folio 281, RD.

[19]See Logan Circle--HABS No. DC-339 and Melissa McLoud, "Craftsmen and Entrepreneurs: Builders in Late Nineteenth-Century Washington, D.C." (Ph.D. diss., George Washington University, 1988), 149.

[20]McLoud, 138.

[21]Frank G. Carpenter, Carp's Washington, Frances Carpenter, ed. (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Co., 1960), 238.

households, which included wives, sons, daughters, and two or three white and black servants who resided with the family. By 1910, however, the neighborhood had begun to change. While some houses on the circle and on Vermont Avenue still had a white male listed as head of household, as in the case of the Carpenters at 1318 Vermont, other houses were inhabited by white widowed women who had lived in their homes since the 1870s or 1880s, as in the case of Maria Robbins at 1314 Vermont. Meanwhile, black and mulatto families were moving into houses on side streets, including the 1200 block of 13th Street and the 1300 block of M Street.

By 1920, census records show that the neighborhood had become ethnically and racially mixed and more densely populated. Whereas the houses in the area had functioned as single-family residences in the late nineteenth century, many now accommodated extended families and lodgers. The majority of inhabitants were renters instead of owners. In some cases white men or women rented a building and then ran it as a boarding house for white lodgers, employed by the government or local companies, as at 1318 and 1344 Vermont, 1322 Rhode Island, 2 Logan Circle, 1306 and 1342 13th Street. In other cases, black families rented houses, especially on 13th Street, at 1324, 1326, 1328, 1336, 1338, and 1340. A number of these families worked in nearby hotels. In addition, the alleys in the neighborhood accommodated black families, many of whom worked as laborers, cooks, and laundresses. The largest alley in the area, called Wylie's Court, was located behind the east side of the 1200 block of Vermont Avenue. Some of the owners of rented buildings lived in the neighborhood at other addresses; however, tax books for 1923-26 show that many absentee landlords lived in outlying parts of the city or in the suburbs.

In the 1930s, the neighborhood underwent another shift. With the election of Franklin D. Roosevelt, African-Americans enjoyed a prominence in the political life of the capital that they had not experienced since Reconstruction. By the 1940s, "the neighborhood was at least one-half black professionals," according to Belford Lawson, a prominent Washington lawyer who lived with his wife, Marjorie, at 8 Logan Circle from 1938-58.[22] The Lawsons leased the third floor of their row house to Congressman Adam Clayton Powell. Other black residents on the circle included Bishop Matthews of the AME Church who lived next door to the Lawsons, Sweet Daddy Grace of the United House of Prayer for All People at 11 Logan Circle, and Dr. Thomas Smith who practiced medicine for forty years at 14 Logan Circle.

Logan Circle became desirable to prominent blacks at this time for a number of reasons. First, despite the speculation that initially brought the neighborhood into being, the housing stock was solid and still displayed an air of civility and sophistication that did not exist in other parts of the city. Second, the circle's location near downtown made it convenient for people who worked for the federal government or for organizations connected to the government. Third, Logan Circle adjoined other prominent black neighborhoods in Washington, namely LeDroit Park and the arca around U Street, now

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[22]"Logan Circle: The Next Georgetown?" Washington Post, 21 May 1973.

known as the Shaw district. Although Logan Circle today is encompassed by the Shaw district, it was a distinct entity in the first half of the twentieth century.

U Street served as the site for the commercial center of black Washington. Following the call of Booker T. Washington and local leaders, including Andrew Hilyer, founder of the Union League, African-Americans created their own center for business and entertainment in response to the strict segregation and Jim Crow laws of the city. The Industrial Savings Bank was located on U Street as was the Lincoln Theater. The Whitelaw Hotel built in 1918-19 at 13th and T Streets accommodated numerous black celebrities, including Joe Louis and Cab Calloway, who could not stay at white hotels in segregated Washington.[23] Many black professionals maintained offices in the area. The Howard Theater, Washington's equivalent to Harlem's Apollo Theater, stood at 620 T Street, linking U Street to LeDroit Park.

Founded in the 1870s as a suburb for middle-class whites, LeDroit Park was the home of the black elite of Washington in the early twentieth century. Beginning in 1893, black professionals began buying houses in LeDroit Park which bordered on Howardtown, so named because of its proximity to Howard University. The neighborhood's convenience to downtown as well as to Howard attracted professionals, officials, and teachers. By the beginning of World War I, black families had nearly displaced whites and LeDroit Park became the most exclusive area of black residence in the city. Robert Terrell, the first black municipal judge of the District and his wife, Mary Church Terrell, an educator and founder of the National Association of Colored Women, lived at 326 T Street. Anna J. Cooper founded the Frelinghuysen University, an adult education facility for working blacks, in her home at 201 T Street. Other notable blacks who lived in LeDroit Park included the poet Paul Laurence Dunbar and the writer Langston Hughes.

By the 1940s, then, Logan Circle stood near the center of black life and culture in Washington. The two main avenues running through the circle, Vermont and Rhode Island, connected Logan Circle to LeDroit Park and the U Street district respectively. Residents of these neighborhoods recalled that at that time Rhode Island Avenue was one of the most beautiful streets in the city, shaded by an archway of trees running from Logan Circle east to the south edge of LeDroit Park.[24]

While LeDroit Park was the home of longtime black residents of the city, Logan Circle seems to have attracted many newcomers to Washington, including Mary McLeod Bethune. In 1943, she purchased 1318 Vermont Avenue to house the headquarters of the National Council of Negro Women. Bethune had initially looked for a building in Dupont Circle, but segregation and cost prevented such a move at that time. Nevertheless, the

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[23]See Whitelaw Apartment Hotel--HABS No. DC-363.

[24]Lilian Thomas Burwell, "Reflection on Le Droit Park: Hilda Wilkinson Brown and Her Neighborhood," Washington History 3:2 (Fall/Winter 1991-92): 49.

NCNW members were pleased to move into the row house on Vermont, their first permanent address. Almost a year later on 15 October 1944, the house was dedicated in a ceremony attended by Eleanor Roosevelt, Agnes Meyer, wife of the editor and publisher of the Washington Post, Dr. Charlotte Hawkins Brown, founder of the Palmer Memorial Institute in North Carolina, and NCNW members from around the country. By this time the NCNW encompassed sixteen national women's organizations and twelve metropolitan organizations with a total of more than 800,000 women members. For Bethune, the day marked the culmination of years of work to promote a better understanding among women of all races.

Much of Bethune's life had been dedicated to furthering the cause of African-Americans, especially women. Born to former slaves in Mayesville, South Carolina, in 1875, Bethune did not begin her formal education until the age of seven. Her experience at the mission school for black children at the Trinity Presbyterian Church in Mayesville encouraged her desire to learn more. With scholarships, the generosity of neighbors, and hard work, Bethune attended Scotia Seminary in North Carolina, and the Moody Bible Institute in Chicago. When she was refused the opportunity to pursue missionary work in Africa, she turned to teaching, later reflecting that "Africans in America needed Christ and school just as much as Negroes in Africa . . . My life work lay not in Africa, but in my own country."[25]

In 1904, she founded the Daytona Normal and Industrial Institute for Negro Girls in Daytona Beach, Florida, with $1.50 in cash. The school taught young women not only academic subjects, but also industrial skills which would make them more employable. Through her aggressive, determined fund-raising, ranging from selling homemade pies to soliciting funds from prominent philanthropists, including James M. Gamble and John D. Rockefeller, Bethune built up the school. In 1923, the school merged with the Cookman Institute, a boys' school in Jacksonville, to become the Bethune-Cookman College, with Bethune as its president.

While many of Betbune's early activities focused on the education of black women, she also fought for equal rights for all African-Americans. During the 1910s and 1920s, she served as an officer of numerous organizations: as president of the Florida Federation of Colored Women, as vice-president of the National Urban League, and as president of the National Association of Colored Women. Her connection to prominent and wealthy whites brought her into contact with the politically powerful in Washington, D.C. In 1930, President Herbert Hoover appointed her to the White House Conference on Child Health. Her personal friendship with Eleanor Roosevelt, begun in 1927, opened doors in the Roosevelt Administration. In 1935, Bethune moved to the District to become the special adviser on minority affairs to the President. In that same year, she founded the National Council of Negro Women as an organization to address national issues in response to what she saw as a tendency to focus on regional issues rather than national

[25]Quoted in Malu Halasa, Mary McLeod Bethune, Educator (New York: Chelsea House Publishers, 1989), 34.

ones in the National Association of Colored Women. The Council would oversee all of the nation's black women's clubs, sororities, and other organizations. She became the NCNW's first president, holding the position officially until 1949.

In addition to her responsibilities with Bethune-Cookman College and the NCNW, Bethune became the Director of the Division of Negro Affairs in the National Youth Administration. She held this position from 1936 to 1943, when the NYA was closed. Bethune had a powerful presence which served her well in her work to bridge the gap between whites and blacks. In discussing Bethune's impact on white Washington in the 1930s, historian Constance Green noted that:

> With her deep-chocolate-colored skin, her heavy build, and rather prognathous jaw, she seemed like a product of darkest Africa--until she spoke. Then the exquisitely musical voice offering sagacious counsel in a perfect Oxford accent carried an impact that left no doubt that here was an extraordinary woman to whom any sensible person would listen with respectful attention.[26]

In a city where skin color determined where one could live, shop, work, and play, Bethune assertively presented herself and her heritage as a person of color, saying many times "Look at me, I am Black, I am Beautiful."

This charisma also smoothed the way for Bethune's dealings with the black elite. "Although nuances indicated a faint irritation among some of Washington's colored elite at her keeping herself somewhat apart from the local community," Bethune's "breadth of knowledge, her perceptiveness, her political finesse, and her direct access to the President were invaluable to the Negro cause."[27] Like the white elite of Washington, the black elite had been stratified by wealth, education, lightness of skin color, and the number of generations one's family had been free.[28] By the 1930s and '40s, however, the oppression of racism for even the most wealthy and well-educated blacks had encouraged unity among all African-Americans. Nevertheless, Bethune's distance from the local black community may have arisen from a number of factors. First, the community's insular nature made it difficult for outsiders to enter. Second, Bethune possessed a broad world view which went far beyond Washington. Her work for the NYA, and her activities on behalf of Bethune-Cookman College, the NCNW, and other organizations, took her around the country and to Europe. Third, despite the support she received from African-Americans in the 1930s and early 1940s, the majority of funding for her various associations was supplied by wealthy, powerful, white men and women. Knowing that support for her institutions depended on the generosity of these people, Bethune

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[26]Constance McLaughlin Green, The Secret City: A History of Race Relations in the Nation's Capital (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1967), 237-238.

[27]Green, 237.

[28]Willard B. Gatewood, Aristocrats of Color: The Black Elite, 1880-1920 (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990), 41.

maintained ties with them. Yet she always emphasized the need for people of color to have self-respect and pride.

The NCNW appointed a committee in October 1940 to find a suitable building for its headquarters. Like many other black professionals and activists, Logan Circle attracted Bethune because of its elegant homes and proximity to downtown Washington. The circle was also close to Dupont Circle, the home of the wealthiest white Washingtonians, sources of patronage for Bethune. Bethune had lived in the other two prominent black neighborhoods during her time in Washington, in LeDroit Park at 316 T Street from 1935 to ca. 1939, and in the U Street district at 1812 9th Street from ca. 1939 to 1943. However, neither neighborhood appears to have provided the location Bethune wanted for the headquarters of the NCNW.

Through the help of John Pinkett, a real estate agent whose daughter was a member of the Council, Bethune and the NCNW settled on the house at 1318 Vermont Avenue. A $10,000 grant from Marshall Field made it possible to pay the $15,500 purchase price. At the 18 December 1943 meeting to discuss the purchase, Sadie T. M. Alexander, the NCNW's lawyer, remarked that the address was "Beyond our comprehension."[29] Plans were quickly made to determine the use of the house, its decoration, and ways to raise money to pay off the mortgage.

From the start Bethune clearly wanted to make the house a center for the interaction of black and white women. The house functioned not merely as the Washington residence of Bethune, but more importantly as a meeting place, an archives, and a home for women visiting the capital. The row house became the physical embodiment of the unifying forces of the NCNW. At the 18 December meeting, members agreed to buy "shares of love and interest in the Council Building [in order] to share in the buying of our permanent headquarters."[30] The women also decided that organizations or individuals should furnish a room, or rooms, in memory of someone. Finally, they agreed that an Interracial Room, on the first floor, to pay tribute to "fine white women like Eleanor Roosevelt," should be included in the building. (This room was later relegated to the third floor as a guest bedroom for unknown reasons.) In addition to the reception and conference rooms on the first floor was a small kitchen, original to the house.[31] The NCNW offices, Bethune's quarters, and a bathroom were located on the second floor. On the third floor were four bedrooms, three of which were decorated by donors, as well as a bathroom and a kitchenette.

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[29]Minutes, Board of Directors' Meeting, 18 December 1943, Washington, D.C., BMA.

[30]National Council of Negro Women, "Telefact," December 1943, Washington, D.C., BMA.

[31]Since no building permits state that a kitchen was added to the house between the time of construction and 1943 when the NCNW bought the property, it can be assumed that the kitchen was original to the house.

Although the NCNW purchased the house filled with antique furniture, Bethune wanted to completely redecorate the building.[32] She enlisted black and white men and women to help with the effort. She hired Hilyard Robinson, a prominent architect known for his public housing projects, to renovate and redecorate the building. He was later discharged, however, because he had not produced any work for the NCNW after seven months. Abe Lichtman, the owner of numerous theaters in the District including the Howard and the Lincoln, agreed to furnish and decorate the front parlor as a reception room. When the room was completed, it had floral carpeting, a grand piano, and Empire-style chairs. Venetian blinds and floral drapes graced the tall windows of the front bay. Over the fireplace hung a large mirror. A wood base filled with flags from all the countries of the world stood on the piano. After the official opening of the house, Bethune wrote a letter of thanks to Mr. and Mrs. Lichtman, saying, "I realized that I stood in the atmosphere of culture and refinement that will help so much to build the unity we all so much desire."[33] According to Jeanetta Welch Brown, executive secretary of the NCNW at the time, Bethune wanted the house to be furnished like the homes of Mrs. Roosevelt or Mrs. Lichtman.[34]

Other rooms, while not furnished quite as elegantly as the reception room, were all decorated with contributions from donors. William L. Dawson, a newly elected Congressman from Chicago and one of only five black men elected to Congress, donated a large (9'-11" x 3'-11") mahogany conference table and chairs for the boardroom in the rear parlor. Dark wood paneling covered the walls, including the west wall where a fireplace had been once. On the second floor, the large front room served as the NCNW office. A black women's sorority that was part of the NCNW, Alpha Kappa Alpha, supplied the desks, chairs, filing cabinets and carpets for this room.[35] To the rear of this room was Bethune's suite, consisting of an office, bedroom, bathroom, and dressing room. According to Jeanetta Welch Brown, the sorority Delta Sigma Theta furnished Bethune's office. Bethune's remaining rooms were funded by the Madame C. J. Walker Manufacturing Company, a producer of beauty products for African-American women. According to a letter from Bethune to Majorie Joyner of the Walker Company, the firm had pledged a total of $2,000 for the suite. By 7 September 1944, $200 had been spent for furniture for Bethune's bedroom:

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[32]Jeanetta Welch Brown, interview by Susan McElrath, 10 July 1992, Tape recording, BMA.

[33]Mary McLeod Bethune to Mr. and Mrs. A.E. Lichtman, 10 November 1944, BMA.

[34]Brown interview.

[35]Ibid.

1 mahogany bed	$ 39.50
1 White Knight box spring and mattress	$148.25
1 mahogany night table	$ 29.75[36]

The third floor contained three bedrooms available for a small fee to women visiting Washington. Each of these rooms contained two twin beds so that a total of six women could be accommodated. All were furnished by individuals or organizations. Buena V. Kelley furnished the front bedroom in memory of her mother Emma Virginia Kelley, founder of the Daughter Elks, an auxiliary to the Elks Club. In addition to the beds, the room contained a portrait of Emma Kelley, a rug, lamps, and bedding. Harriet Curtis Hall and Eleanor Curtis Dailey furnished the bedroom behind the Elks Room. The May 1944 issue of "Telefact," the newsletter of the NCNW, stated that the Curtis Room, dedicated to the memory of Hall and Dailey's mother, had been finished, complete with a portrait of Mrs. Curtis. Like the Elks Room, the Curtis Room was simply furnished with beds, night tables, and lamps. The third bedroom, initially intended to be dedicated to the memory of Bessye Bearden, member of the NCNW and wife of the artist Romare Bearden, became known alternately as the Interracial Room and the International Room. Audley Moore, president of the Bessye Bearden Club in New York City, offered to raise $1,500 from members for redecorating, carpeting, and furnishing of the room.[37] By 6 February 1945, as completion on the room neared, Bethune had decided to call it the International Room.[38] The small front room on the third floor also functioned as a bedroom, though not for paying visitors. During Bethune's residence in the house Georgia Bethune, Bethune's niece, and Dr. Etna Beulah Winston, used the room while caring for the NCNW president. Bethune, who was in her seventies, suffered from many ailments, including asthma. Throughout all the planning, correspondence indicates that Bethune, in consultation with the various donors, was largely responsible for the decoration of the house in the 1940s.

During 1944, the year of the house's renovation, Bethune looked for a name for the building. In June 1944 she wrote to Dr. William Agar in New York City:

> We have bought for the National Council of Negro Women a very nice house here where we hope to do a real piece of work in interracial understanding.[39]

She added that she hoped to call the house "Freedom House" after the building housing Agar's organization. Agar's response is not known. However by 1945, 1318 Vermont had

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[36]Mary McLeod Bethune to Marjorie S. Joyner, 7 September 1944, BMA.

[37]Jeanetta Welch Brown to Audley Moore, 7 January 1944, BMA. Audley Moore to Jeaneatta Welch Brown, 20 July 1944, BMA.

[38]Audley Moore to Mary McLeod Bethune, 15 February 1944, BMA. Mary McLeod Bethune to Audley Moore, 6 February 1945, BMA.

[39]Mary McLeod Bethune to William Agar, 29 June 1944, BMA.

become known as the "Council House." The name must have suited Bethune, for the words conjured ideas of unity, gathering, and formality. It is clear, then, that the house did not serve as Bethune's home, but only as her Washington, D.C., residence. Bethune considered her home to be "the Retreat," a house purchased for her by Thomas White and James Gamble in the 1910s on the campus of Bethune-Cookman College.[40] As she grew older and increasingly infirm, she spent more and more time in Daytona Beach. In a letter to her son in October 1944 she stated, "I shall hereafter live partly here and partly in Florida."[41]

Despite her pleasure at the success of the house's renovation and opening, Bethune continued to look for headquarters in what she considered a more desirable location for her fundraising work--namely Dupont Circle. In February 1948 she wrote to Sadie T. M. Alexander:

> I have found the dream house for the Council Headquarters. I have had this idea in mind all these years. It is spacious, beautiful and detached, right off Dupont Circle and would afford us the kind of cultural setting and surrounding that our Council must have.[42]

However, racism still thwarted Bethune. In a letter to Alexander dated 29 March 1948, she noted that there was a problem buying the house "concerning race." The owner refused to sell the house to a black organization. Ironically, when a fire caused serious damage to the house in 1966, after advances in civil rights had broken down some of the city's segregation, the NCNW moved its headquarters to Dupont Circle at 1346 Connecticut Avenue, across the circle from the house Bethune had wanted to purchase.

Bethune remained president of the NCNW until 1949, though she continued to wield great power within the organization until her death in 1955. Despite frequent illness, she continued to travel, give speeches, and raise money on behalf of the NCNW, Bethune-Cookman College, the NAACP, and other groups. In 1945, she served as a special representative of the State Department attending the conference in San Francisco which established the United Nations. She was one of three African-Americans, including W.E.B. DuBois and Walter White, in attendance. In 1951, President Truman appointed her to his Committee of Twelve for National Defense. In that same year she also became president of the Central Life Insurance Company of Florida, which she helped found in the 1920s to provide insurance for blacks in the state. At the time she was the only female president of an insurance company in the country.

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[40] Halasa, 48-49.

[41] Mary McLeod Bethune to Albert Bethune, 27 October 1944, BMA.

[42] Mary McLeod Bethune to Sadie T.M. Alexander, 24 February 1948, BMA.

A truly remarkable woman, Bethune confronted problems with a determination and enthusiasm that knew no bounds. She once said, "I would not exchange my color for all the wealth in the world, for had I been born white, I might not have been able to do all I have done or yet hope to do." As part of the National Park Service system, "Council House" will stand as a testament to Bethune's achievements and her desire to promote understanding among the races.

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architcctural character: The row house at 1318 Vermont Avenue is one of a number of structures erected in the Logan Circle area in the 1870s as part of a larger development for upper-class and upper middle-class white residents of the city. Its dignified Second Empire style with Neo-Grec details, shared by other buildings on Vermont Avenue and neighboring streets, served to attract investors and residents to a part of Washington originally laid out by L'Enfant, which had not yet been developed.

2. Condition of fabric: The exterior and interior of the house are generally excellent. There is some cracking of the interior plaster walls, but otherwise the building is sound.

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Overall dimensions: The building stands three stories high with a basement and an attic. A rear ell projects toward the west end of the lot. A large bay window dominates the three-bay main facade on Vermont Avenue.

2. Foundations: The brick basement walls are about 15" thick.

3. Walls: The walls are constructed of red brick laid in an eight-course common bond, except for the east or street facade which has no rows of headers and is most likely a brick veneer over a brick supporting wall. This wall has been stuccoed over at the basement level, below the front windows and stoop. The entire wall is now painted a pinkish red. The front section of the house shares its north and south walls with the neighboring structures. The south wall of the ell faces an open part of the lot and remains unpainted. The rear wall of the house has been stuccoed over the brick and painted the same red color as the front of the building.

4. Structural systems, framing: Brick masonry, with wood floor joists and roof rafters.

5. Stoops and porticoes: Ashlar stones resting on the brick foundation of the house support the front stoop. Five brownstone steps, flanked by heavy wrought-iron railings painted brown, lead to the front entrance. The newel posts of the railings have octagonal shaped posts similar to those on the interior staircases. At the back of the house stands a one-story porch, added in 1991, which runs the length of the rear wall. Its two white metal columns with fluted shafts and Doric capitals support a slightly sloped roof of tin with standing seams. The roof has been painted red.

6. Chimneys: Two interior brick chimneys rise through the house. One is centered along the common wall on the south side of the building. The other is centered along an interior wall at the west end of the rear ell. Both chimneys have short straight stacks.

7. Openings:

   a. Doorways and doors: The main entrance into the house is located in the north bay of the facade. Originally, two paneled wood doors with long, rectangular single-light windows opened onto the entry vestibule. However, they have since been replaced by full-length black wrought-iron gates. An arched wood pediment supported by two scrolled brackets crowns the entrance. Modillions and a flat leaf-shaped molding below run underneath the arch. Wood stiles with long recessed panels frame the doorway. The entrance surround is painted tan. The front doors, between the vestibule and the front wall, are stained dark brown and have raised panels of maple burl veneer in the lower third of each door; long arched windows fill the upper two thirds. A single-pane transom allows light into the entry hall. The basement door, located directly under the front stoop, has been replaced, as has the rear door leading to the backyard patio.

   b. Windows: The large bay window to the left of the entrance dominates the street facade of the house. The frame of the bay, which has beaded wood stiles, rises to a cornice and balustrade above. Modillions and molding identical to those on the arched pediment over the front doorway run along the underside of the cornice. Above the cornice, curved balusters support a wide railing secured by square posts at the four corners of the bay. Tin with standing seams covers the roof of the bay. The bay encompasses three two-over-two-light double-hung sash windows with a slight arch to the upper light of each. In addition to these windows, one rectangular two-over-two-light double-hung sash is set in the west wall of the main section of the house. In the rear parlor, three six-over-six-light double-hung windows face south. Simple brick arched lintels and straight sills frame these windows on the side and rear walls of the house.

Along the bay at the basement level are three single-light windows covered by wrought-iron bars. Neither the glass nor the bars are original to the structure. Along the south wall are four evenly-spaced six-over-six-light double-hung windows.

On the second story, three symmetrically placed windows run along the street facade. They are capped by wood segmental pediments decorated with cabled molding and supported by carved wood brackets. Applied carved scrolls fill the space beneath the slight arch of the pediment. Each window has a two-over-two-light double-hung sash with slightly arched upper lights. In the west wall, near the corner where the ell meets the main part of the building, is one eight-over-twelve-light double-hung window. Along the south side of the ell are three six-over-six-light double-hung windows. At the south end of the rear wall is one six-over-six-light double-hung window. The arched lintel has been stuccoed over, but the brick sill is still visible.

On the third story a single six-over-nine-light double-hung window pierces the west wall of the main section of the house. Along the west wall of the ell, two six-over-nine-light double-hung windows between the first and second, and second and third floors illuminate the rear stairwell of the house.

All exterior window trim has been painted tan.

8. Roof:

a. Shape, covering: A mansard roof covered with hexagonal slate shingles graces the street facade of the house. At the roofline and at the juncture of the two slopes runs a simple wood molding. Vertical cable molding defines the ends of the lower slope where they meet the roofs of the neighboring buildings. The part of the roof which cannot be seen from the street is an unusual shape. The front part, which runs the length of the main part of the structure, is sloped slightly toward the rear. The roof over the ell is 3' lower than the front roof and slopes slightly toward the south side of the building. Tin sheets with standing seams cover the roof. The roof has been replaced several times.

b. Cornice, eaves: A thick wood cornice supported by four wood consoles marks the line between the brick wall and the tiled mansard roof of the east facade. Modillions above a bead-and-reel molding run along the underside of the cornice. Photographs of the house in 1944 show a decorative iron railing, no longer extant, above the cornice. The railing was probably original to the house. Brick dentils, one brick wide, edge the roofline along the south and west walls of the ell. Just above these are

rain gutters which lead to downspouts at the junction of the ell and the main part of the house and at the southwest corner of the ell. The cornice has been painted tan.

c. Dormers: Three dormers project from the mansard roof along the front of the house at the third story. The tops and sides of the dormers are clad with hexagonal slate shingles which match those on the mansard itself. Each dormer is capped by an arched wood pediment crowned by a carved wood keystone. Scrolled brackets flank each dormer where it rises from the cornice.

Each dormer encases an east-facing window. The two-over-two-light double-hung sashes are capped by arched pediments decorated with carved wood keystones.

C. Description of Interior:

1. Floor plans: The basement runs the full length of the building and contains a kitchen, lunch room, bathroom, and four storage rooms. This level has been completely remodeled. The remaining floors of the house follow an L-shaped plan. The main or front section shares common walls with the houses to the left and right. The rear ell opens onto an airshaft on the south side of the lot. The hallway runs from the entrance, past the main staircase along the north wall of the building to a service staircase at the rear of the structure. The plans of the first and second floors appear to be original. The first floor has two parlors and a kitchen. The second floor has two large front rooms, a bathroom, a conference room, and an office. The third floor has been slightly modified to accommodate five offices and a bathroom.

2. Stairways: The main stairway runs straight up to the second floor in twenty-three steps with a ninety-degree turn to the left at the top. Between the second and third floors there are eighteen steps with a ninety-degree turn to the left at the top, a landing, and then three more steps at a ninety-degree turn leading down the hall to the front of the house. The steps and risers are made of oak. The railings are also oak and end at the bottom of the stairs in a heavy octagonal newel post. The balusters supporting the railing match the newel post. The balusters on the first-floor staircase appear to be replacements. The raised panels of the wainscoting along the wall below the stairs have been grained to match the mabogany and maple burl veneers of the panels on the pocket doors in the first-floor parlors. This paneling treatment is a ca. 1988 restoration of the original wainscoting. Stair brackets run along the outside edges of the steps under the balusters on the staircases on both floors. The stairway to the basement runs below the main stairs. Its balusters are simple turned posts; the railing is a pared-down version of the one on the main stairs. The rear service stairway has the same simple posts and railings as the basement stairs. However, it is curved to fit

into a narrow square-shaped stairwell which rises through the house at the northwest corner of the building. The main stairway from the first to the second floor is covered with a runner. The basement stairs and those from the second to the third floor are completely carpeted. The service stairs have rubber runners.

3. Flooring: Original flooring on the first floor was destroyed by fire in 1966. Varnished red oak boards, 2 1/4" wide and running lengthwise from the front of the house to the back, were installed on the first floor during the renovation of 1975-78. Wall-to-wall carpeting covers the floors on the basement, second and third levels.

4. Wall and ceiling finish: Originally the walls and ceilings were covered with lath and plaster. The plaster wall finish on the first floor and on parts of the second and third floors appear to be intact. The outer corners of the first-floor parlor walls have beading ending in lamb's-tongue details. None of the original plaster ceilings remain. The medallions around the chandeliers, the cornice in the parlors and in the entry hall, and the ceiling moldings and pendants in the rear parlor are restorations of the original plaster decoration. The 10"-high baseboards throughout the first-floor rooms have been painted to look like oak and are replacements. The walls on the first floor are a cream color; the moldings and other plaster ornament are tan. The second- and third-floor walls and trim have been painted white.

   The second-floor ceiling is covered with coffered tin, but is hidden by a dropped ceiling of acoustic panels.

5. Openings:

   a. Doorways and doors: The doors throughout the house vary in size, shape, and color. Many of them have been replaced by plain wood doors. However, the pocket doors in the first-floor front parlor and the doors in the rear parlor appear to be original to the house. These doors have mahogany stiles with three raised panels of light and dark maple burl veneer. The doors are nearly as tall as the ceiling and can be hidden completely in the wall pockets. One set of pocket doors is located off the left side of the hall into the front parlor. The other set is placed in the wall separating the front and rear parlors. Two doors at either end of the west wall of the rear parlor match the pocket doors and appear to have been installed when the house was built. The interior side of the front doors in the entry have been grained to match the pocket doors. The frames around all these doors have been grained to look like oak. On the second floor, most doors have been replaced. The possible exceptions are the closet doors in the two rooms at the front of the house. The two closets in the first room have double doors, each with six recessed panels. The second room has two closets, each with one five-panel door; the

panels are arranged vertically. Above each door is a single-panel door concealing a cabinet. The third-floor closets may also have original doors. The closet in the front hall has two sets of double doors with three raised panels each. The closet in the rear hall has two doors, each with two raised panels. All the closet doors run from floor to ceiling and are painted white.

b. Windows: The frames and the wainscoting below all the windows on the first floor have been replaced. Like the door frames, the window frames and muntins have been painted to resemble oak. The paneling has been grained to look like maple burl. The first-floor windows still work with rope pulls and weights which may be original. The glass panes are original. The windows on this level are especially large in order to allow as much light as possible into the house since the entire north wall and half of the south wall lack windows. The three windows in the bay run nearly the full height of the 12'-high first-floor walls. The other windows are also large, ranging from 3' to 4'-6" in height. The east windows on the second floor have retained their original frames, pulls, and weights. The frames on this level are much simpler than those on the first floor. The rest of the windows on the second and third levels have new frames and aluminum sliders. The dormer windows on the third floor are recessed into the wall and have no frames.

6. Decorative features and trim: Originally there were at least four fireplaces in the house. All the fireplaces in the house have been closed up; the mantel in the rear parlor on the first floor has been removed. Only the hearth remains. The white marble mantels in the front parlor and on the second floor have arched openings with floral ornamentation and probably original. A twentieth-century brick fireplace has been built in the basement.

7. Hardware: Most of the door knobs have been replaced by brass knobs. However, some doors on the first floor still have white porcelain knobs and/or brass faceplates with filigree decoration. The metal escutcheons and pulls on both sets of pocket doors are pewter in color and appear to be original.

8. Mechanical equipment:

a. Heating, air conditioning, ventilation: The original heating system was probably steam heat. It has since been replaced by a forced air system. The air-conditioning system was installed during the renovations of 1975-78.

b. Lighting: The cut-glass prism chandeliers on the first floor do not appear to be original to the house as there are no fixtures to accommodate gas

fuel and it is unlikely that they were designed to house candles. These may have been added in 1944 under Bethune's direction.

c. Plumbing: The original plumbing system was first replaced in 1944, and later in 1975-78. The house was built with one bathroom on the second floor. In 1944, a second bathroom was installed on the third floor. The renovations of 1975-78 included the construction of a bathroom in the basement.

9. Original furnishings: There are no furnishings original to the house. Pieces from the Bethune era remain, though not in their original places. The Bethune Museum and Archives still possesses the 9'-11" x 3'-11" mahogany veneer table and twelve chairs once located in the rear parlor, some chairs from the front parlor, and Bethune's bed, desk, and two of her paintings from her room on the second floor.

D. Site:

1. Historic landscape design: The house is set on a slight rise of land above street level. A black wrought-iron fence, about 3' high, surrounds the front yard. Identical gates run along the sidewalk and around tbe yards of the neighboring buildings. Just inside the two arched wrought-iron gate doors is a short sidewalk with black and white marble squares laid in concrete in a checkerboard pattern. Three stone steps lead to the next sidewalk with the same checkerboard pattern. This walk leads to the front stoop. The entire walk has been restored. The two houses south of the site have similar sidewalks. Flower beds line the perimeter of the yard and border a central lawn to the left of the front steps. In tbe center of the lawn stands a large black iron urn on a pedestal. This planter is similar to one that was original to the site. The two houses south of the Bethune House also have planters in the same location. The back yard has been completely redesigned.

2. Outbuildings: The only outbuilding at the site is a two-story brick carriage house. The walls are laid in an irregular common bond with courses ranging from headers at every fifth row at the middle height of the walls to every eighth row at the top and bottom of the walls. Brick dentils add some ornament to the roofline. The windows in the east and west facades, facing the rear of the house and the alley respectively, have been removed and replaced by aluminum sliding windows. One small arched brick lintel in the east wall is the only evidence of original fenestration. The windows in the west or alley side of the building are all new. A small door in the north end of the wall has replaced the large sliding garage door which originally opened onto the alley. The building has a flat roof covered with 40-lb. tin. The interior has been completely gutted and remodeled.

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Washington Post. 1935-93.

C. Likely Sources Not Yet Investigated:

Mary McLeod Bethune Papers. Bethune-Cookman College, Daytona Beach, Florida. (Collection closed for microfilming during period of this project, Summer 1993.)

PART IV. PROJECT INFORMATION

This project was sponsored by the National Capital Region (NCR) of the National Park Service, Robert Stanton, Director, under the direction of Dwight Pitcaithley, Chief, Cultural Resources Services Division, and Rebecca Stevens, Regional Historical Architect, Professional Services Division, NCR; and the National Council of Negro Women, Dorothy Height, Director. The documentation was undertaken by the Historic American Buildings Survey (HABS), Robert J. Kapsch, Chief, under the direction of Paul Dolinsky, Chief of

HABS; with assistance by HABS architect Joseph D. Balachowski and HABS senior historian Alison K. Hoagland. The project was completed during summer 1993 at the HABS office in Washington, D.C., by project supervisor Isabel Chia-Yi Yang, architect, with architects Robert R. Arzola and Richard A. Ventrone, Jr., architecture technicians Tom Behrens and Lori Smith, and HABS/HAER intern Virginia Carter. The project historian was Julie Nicoletta. Jack E. Boucher, HABS photographer, produced the photographs.

Figure #1 "Reception Room at Council House," 1946, Bethune Museum and Archives.

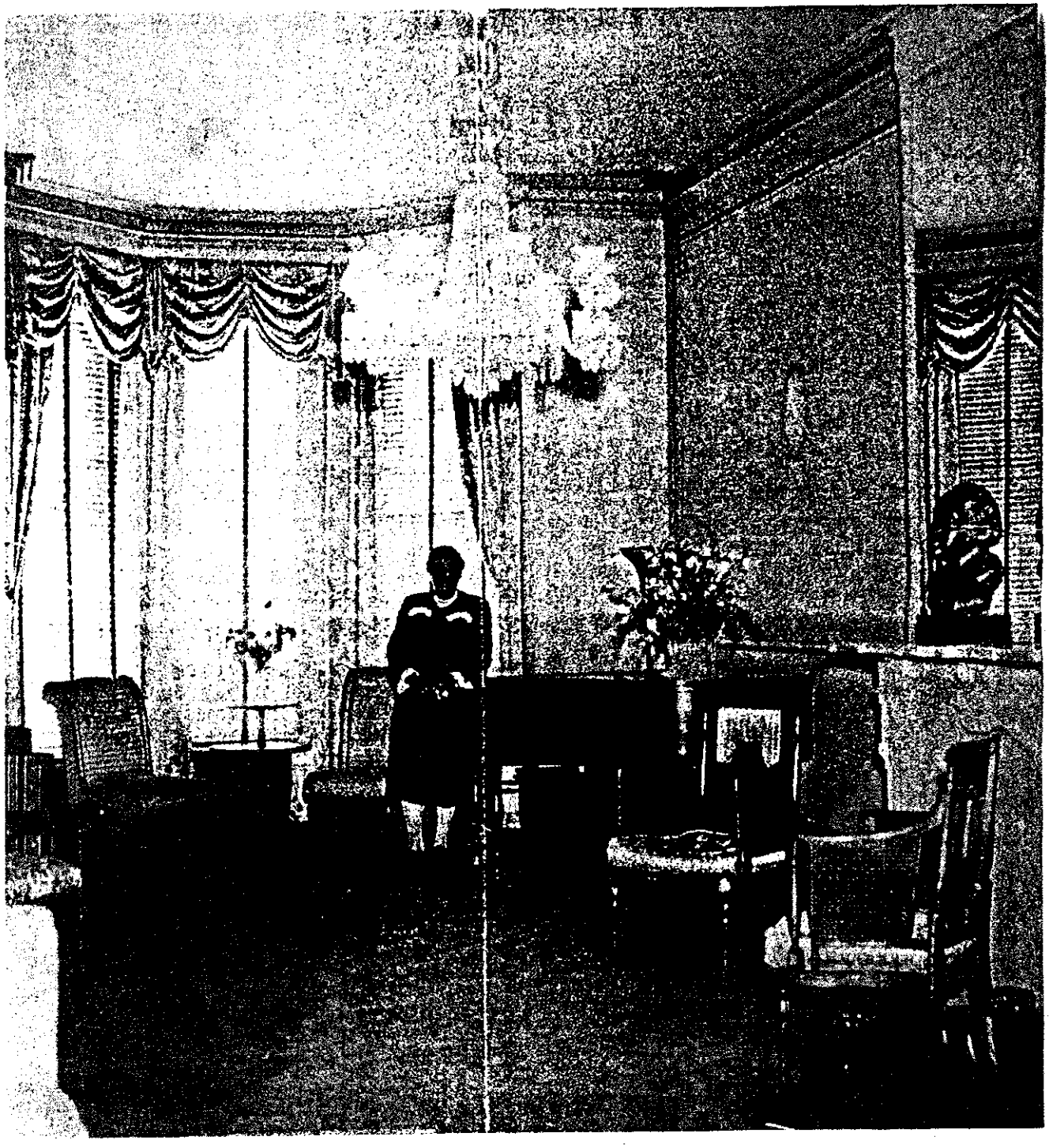


Figure #2 Formal Dinner, Boardroom, Bethune House, 1940s, Bethune Museum and Archives.

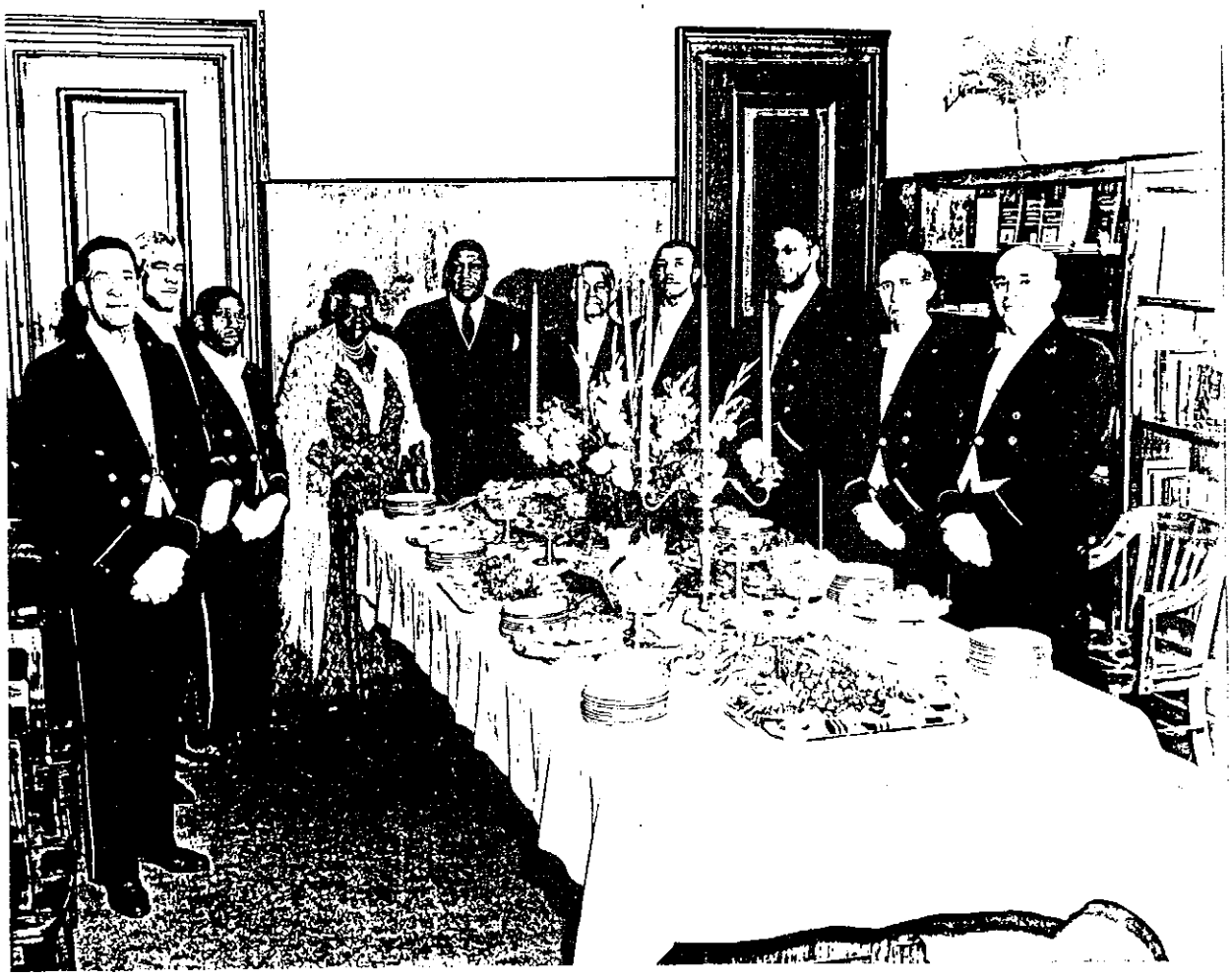
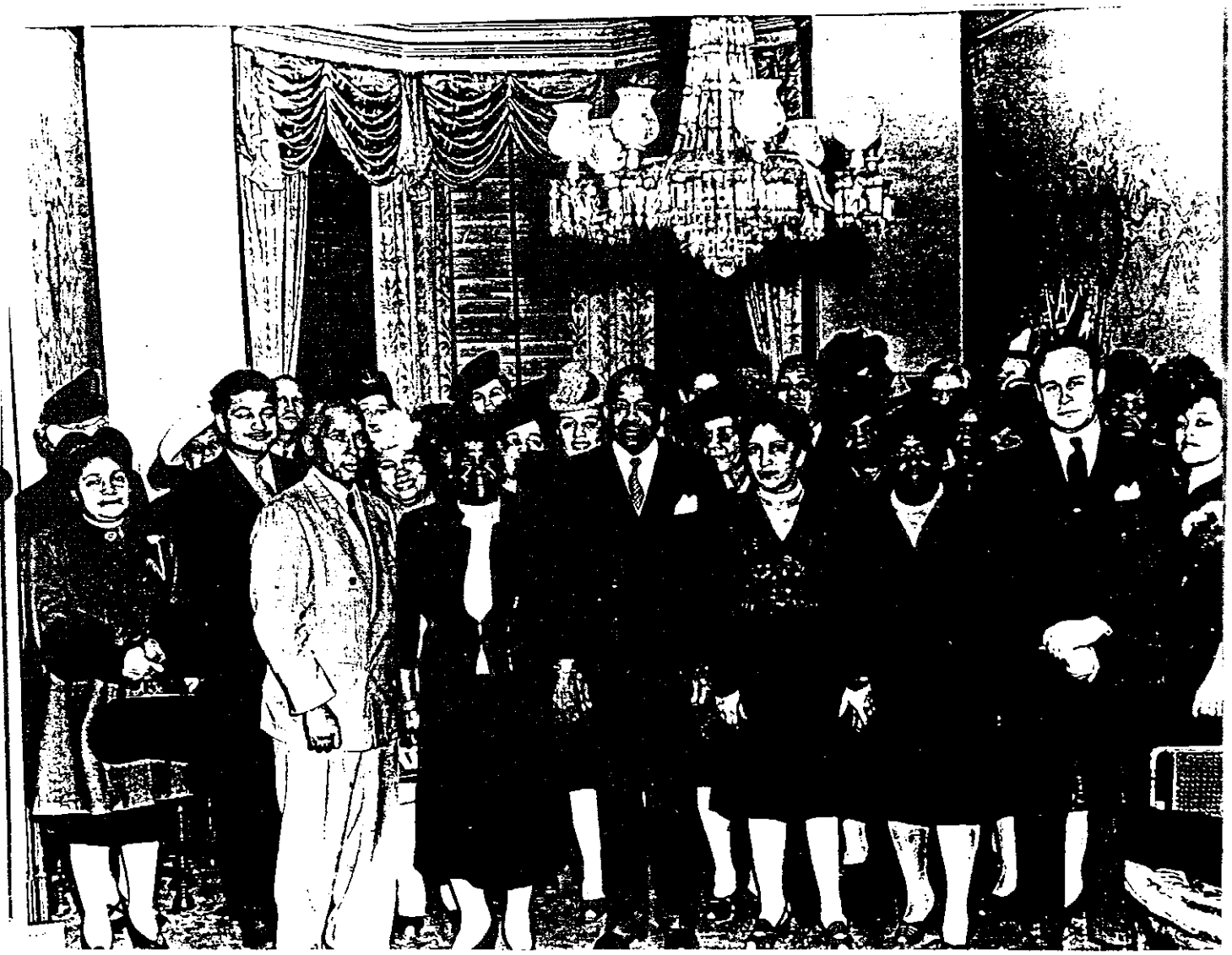


Figure #3 Reception Room, Bethune House, 1940s, Bethune Museum and Archives.



ADDENDUM TO:
1318 VERMONT AVENUE, NORTHWEST (HOUSE)
(Mary McLeod Bethune House)
Mary McLeod Bethune Council House National Historic Site
Washington
District of Columbia

HABS DC-775
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